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ABSTRACT

A study examined the differences between women who choose traditional and nontraditional career options. A 78-item inventory, which solicited information concerning vocational goals, demography, study skills, attitudes, and activities, was administered to 530 incoming female freshmen at the University of Maryland in College Park, Maryland. Of those surveyed, 42 percent had a nontraditional career goal, 14 percent chose a traditional career, and 27 percent had a neutral career goal. Data indicated that the nontraditional group had higher grades, better study habits, and more interest in graduate school and investigative occupations, while those in the traditional group were more interested in social occupations and felt that a college degree was the only way to enter their chosen careers. Survey results supported the hypothesis that both encouragement to explore nontraditional career choices and exposure to role models in nontraditional fields are important factors in influencing women to make nontraditional career choices. Not supported were the hypotheses (1) that having a mother work outside the home was an important influence in making nontraditional choices; and (2) that women making nontraditional choices would more likely perceive the attitudes of significant others as being more favorable toward their nontraditional choices. (MN)

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Research Report # 1-81

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DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WOMEN WHO CHOOSE TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL CAREERS

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Summary

530 incoming freshmen women completed a questionnaire on their vocational goals which were studied in relation to demographic information, study skills, attitudes and activities. Forty-two percent had a non-traditional (for women) career goal (e.g., physician, biochemist), 14% chose a traditional career (e.g., nurse, teacher), while 27% had a neutral career goal (neither traditional nor non-traditional) and 21% had no career goal.

The non-traditional group had higher grades, better study habits, more interest in graduate school, and investigative occupations, while the traditional group was more interested in social occupations and said that a college degree was the only way to enter their career choice. The neutral group felt weakest in math, and tended to choose artistic careers.

The implications of women entering the University with non-traditional career goals but being employed primarily in traditional jobs upon graduation, as shown in other studies, were discussed.

Women comprise 42% of the paid work force (National Commission on Working Women, 1979), and yet 70% of these women are employed in only three occupational groups which have been traditionally defined as "appropriate" jobs for women: Clerical, service, and professional/technical (Rieder, 1977). These traditional jobs for women are lower paying and lower prestige jobs than those traditionally defined as "appropriate" for men. Women who choose traditional career options earn 59 cents for every $1.00 men earn (U.S. Department of Labor, 1979). Some women are beginning to choose non-traditional careers, and there is evidence that there are differences between women who choose traditional careers and those who choose non-traditional careers.

Women who decide to enter non-traditional careers engage in less sex-role stereotyping than women who choose traditional careers (Brandt, 1977; Crawford, 1978) particularly in that they consider being married and having children as less important than women who choose traditional careers (Trigg & Perlman, 1976). They also have a higher achievement orientation (Brandt, 1977; Puig-Casauranc, 1976; Tenzer, 1977), and are more likely to perceive the attitudes of significant others as favorable toward non-traditional careers (Trigg & Perlman, 1976). It also has been demonstrated that the influence of parents as role models in non-traditional career choice is important (Tenzer, 1977).

The purpose of this study was to examine differences between women who choose traditional and non-traditional career options. It was hypothesized that exposure to non-traditional role models, and encouragement to explore non-traditional choices were important variables in influencing women to make non-traditional choices.

Procedure

The sample consisted of 530 incoming freshmen women at the University of Maryland, College Park, who completed a 78-item inventory which included an

item on their first three occupational choices, during a summer orientation program.

The first stated occupational choice was coded as either traditional (female-dominated), non-traditional (male-demonated), neutral (dominated by neither females or males), or no goal (no occupational goals were stated). Using the 1980 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Statistics data, occupations were classified as traditional if over 61% of the workers were women and non-traditional if over 61% of the workers were men (Crawford, 1978; Slaughter, 1976). Examples of traditional choices were nurse, elementary school teacher, medical technician, and nutritionist. Examples of non-traditional choices included physician, lawyer, architect, biochemist, and veterinarian.

Data were analyzed by chi square and analysis of variance with student Newman-Keuls post-hoc tests.

RESULTS

Of the 530 incoming women who completed the inventory, 42% indicated a non-traditional career choice, whereas only 14% chose a traditional career goal. Also, 22% had a career goal that was neutral (neither traditional nor non-traditional), and 21% stated no career goal.

Of 78 statistical tests conducted, 21 were significant at the .05 level. According to Sakoda, Cohen and Beall (1954) one would expect about 8 tests to be significant due to chance, thus the results were significant beyond chance.

When asked what their main reason for deciding to go to college, was, the non-traditional group indicated that it was preparation for graduate school; they stated that the highest academic degree that they intended to receive was Medical, and they intended to go to graduate school after graduation. In terms of past academic performance, the non-traditional group indicated that their average grade in high school had been A or A+, and they ranked in the top 10% of

their high school graduating class. In the area of study skills, the non-traditional group indicated that they almost always kept up with reading assignments.

On the other hand, the traditional group was more likely to feel that their most important long-term career choice was working with people than was the non-traditional group. The traditional group also was more likely to feel that if they remained at the University and graduated, the reason would be because a college degree was the only way to enter their career choice.

The neutral group was more likely to state that their weakest academic area was math than was the non-traditional group.

The traditional group more often chose Social occupations, the non-traditional group more often chose Investigative occupations, and the neutral group tended to choose Artistic careers (Holland, 1979).

Compared to the other groups, the traditional group was less interested in seeking educational or vocational counseling. In the area of study skills, the non-traditional group indicated that writing papers was a more difficult task for them than did the traditional group; the non-traditional group did their homework at a more significantly consistent time each day than did the no goal group; the no goal group wanted to improve their spelling skills significantly more than did the non-traditional group; and the non-traditional group rarely missed high school classes, whereas the no goal group did.

On items related to attitudes and values, the non-traditional group tended to favor the draft resumption more than did the traditional group, and when asked whether or not they expected to use the University Health Center for birth control information, both the neutral and no goal groups agreed significantly more so than did either the traditional or non-traditional groups. The traditional group tended to disagree with the statement that living together before marriage is OK, whereas the neutral group tended to

agree. Furthermore, the non-traditional group agreed that financial aid should be given on merit, and did not need significantly more than the neutral group and the no goal group. The traditional group was found to have done significantly more volunteer work than the other three groups.

Finally, the non-traditional group tended to have talked more with people regarding non-traditional careers than did the no goal group, and the non-traditional group was also encouraged to explore non-traditional interests significantly more than the traditional group.

DISCUSSION

It is particularly interesting to note that of the 530 women in this study, 42% of them were considering careers in non-traditional fields as compared to 14% who were considering traditional career options. Perhaps this is indicative of a new trend of women no longer restricting and limiting their choices to careers traditionally defined as "appropriate" to their gender, but instead, expanding their options and exploring more non-traditional fields. However, this high percentage of women choosing non-traditionalc areer goals is in sharp contrast with another study recently completed at the University of Maryland which found that most women who graduated from the University of Maryland in 1979 tended to enter traditional occupations in settings traditional for their sex (Knight, Sedlacek, & Bachhuber, 1980). This seems to indicate that, although women may <u>enter</u> the University with career aspirations of a non-traditional nature, they are, in actuality, still entering more traditional fields such as clerical work and sales.

The data support several conclusions. Women who make non-traditional career choices seem to have higher achievement orientation, they make better grades in high school and have higher academic rankings, they are more conscientious students in high school, they have better study skills, and they have clear and decisive academic and career goals. It was also shown that

women choosing non-traditional career options were encouraged to explore their non-traditional interests and had exposure to non-traditional role models. This supports the hypothesis that both encouragement to explore non-traditional career choices and exposure to role models in non-traditional fields are important factors in influencing women to make non-traditional career choices.

The hypothesis that having a mother work outside of the home was an important influence in making non-traditional choices was not supported in this study, nor was the hypothesis that women making non-traditional choices would more likely perceive the attitudes of significant others as being more favorable toward their non-traditional choices.

The hypothesis that women who enter traditional careers seem to engage in more sex-role stereotyping was partially supported. For those women choosing traditional careers, the most important factor in their long-term career choice was working with people, which may be a result of their own sex-role stereotyping, since working with people is an "appropriate" interest for women. Likewise, the traditional group engaged in significantly more volunteer work than the other groups, again, a traditional and stereotypical role for women. They also held the more traditional value in the item relating to living together before marriage. The results indicated that women choosing traditional career goals engaged in some stereotypic behaviors. Whether or not, however, this was a direct result of sex-role stereotyping cannot be concluded from these data.

Writing papers was a more difficult task for the non-traditional group than for the traditional group; perhaps because good writing and language skills have traditionally been defined as within the woman's domain. Also, the non-traditional group favored giving financial aid more on merit than need.

This is probably due to the fact that they tend to have a high academic orientation and would like to be rewarded for it.

It was interesting to note that the traditional group who had stated career choices were still interested in seeking some vocational counseling, whereas the no goal group was not interested. It appeared that the no goal group not only had no clear-cut career goals, but also was not interested in establishing any.

The results of this study seemed to offer further validation to previous findings regarding the differences between women who choose traditional and non-traditional careers, as well as to provide some additional understanding of the differences between these two groups. It appeared that women who make non-traditional career choices had higher achievement orientation, seemed to engage in less sex-role stereotyping, had better study skills, were more encouraged to explore non-traditional interests, and had more exposure to nontraditional role models than women who choose traditional careers.

In light of the results of this study, and those of the Knight, Sedlacek, & Bachhuber study (1980), it is clear that more research needs to be done to try to determine exactly what happens to these women who enter college with non-traditional career goals and yet pursue traditional careers when they graduate. Do these goals change while they are in college or when these women are confronted with the realities of the job market? Does the impact of women's socialization (i.e., fear of success, fear of failure, lack of confidence and assertiveness) incluence the changes? In the meantime student personnel specialists should implement workshops and counseling programs designed to deal with these issues so that more women will not only consider non-traditional careers, but will actively pursue them after graduation.

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